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ABSTRACT

Designed as a unit for an international relations course, this systems approach paper outlines a learning method which contributes to the student's awareness that the United States is only one of many actors in the world. It also makes the student aware that there are limitations on the U. S. individual actions because of this interdependence and commonality of interest. Divided into parts, the first section of the outline discusses why the infiltration of the international relations into existing social sciences programs is needed while the second section focuses on the use of the systems approach in teaching. This unit can also make use of films and would require at least 1 week of class time with outside assignments. (FDI)

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The International System

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This unit can make use of 1 or 2 films, would require at least a week of class time with outside assignments. The systems approach is an important learning method as a means of contributing to the student's awareness that the US is only one of many actors in the world and that there are limitations on its individual actions because of this interdependence and commonality of interests.

I. Introduction

A. Infiltration of international relations into existing social science programs is needed.

There are several different approaches to the study of every social science
i.e., in history, approaches include:
- Marxist
- Great Man
- Social ideas
- Change v. continuity

Different perspectives exist for studying international relations.
Two types of approaches
1. decision-making
2. international systems approach

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B. Decision-making

Decision-making approach used usually in an unstructured way
Decision-maker often unconsciously goes through steps
Focus is on individuals, their own psychological makeup and the factors which impinge on them as both individuals and decision-makers.

decision-making approach is the general way used by individual commentators in thinking about politics

C. International Systems
Most lacking in the American perspective of World affairs is an awareness of the interdependence of all nations and the constraints on each nation due to this interdependence.
Common belief exists that US has unlimited choice of action based on its economic, political and cultural superiority

Systems approach emphasizes this interdependence focusing on the idea that it's the system which causes things to be the way they are.

II. Use of the Systems Approach in Teaching

A. Definition of "System"

Classroom discussion led by the teacher might proceed something like this: What is a "System"; give me some examples. Well, a system has parts, processes are repeated, there is an organization and a purpose. A car is a system, plumbing is a system. We have social systems. A school is a social system. So is a family, a country, a business, even the world.

B. Analysis of a system

Suppose you were going to move, and you had a choice of two schools. How would you compare them, what questions would you ask--what criteria would you use to analyze a school system? Answers would include things like the reputation of the school, how many students go on to college, what kind of extracurricular activities are supported, how is the sports program, are there racial problems, how good are the physical facilities, etc.

There are five basic questions which are important in looking at any social system, and questions asked about a school will generally reflect one of the following categories:

1. How many and what types of actors are there?
2. What issues are dealt with by the system?
3. What polarity exists and how is conflict structured in the system?
4. What is the organizational structure of the system?
5. What is the distribution of resources in the system?

C. Application of the framework to the international system.

1. Next there is a discussion of what these five items would refer to on an international level, e.g., what kinds of organization are there (the U.N., alliances, etc.), what is the polarity of the world, what issues are important on a world-wide basis.

2. Comparison of two historical periods

a.) Any two periods may be used--China in 221 B.C. or 1949; Europe in 1815 and 1918, etc. The following example compares the Cold War world of 1953 with the world today. (See below for comparative chart.)

b.) Consideration of the 5 variables or criteria might produce the following comparison:

1. actors--there are more actors today such as economic groups, ethnic groups, regional groups, business groups, ideological groups, etc. than there were in 1952-53.
2. issues--the major issues have changed from a focus on military security to a multitude of concerns including such things as population control, differences in life-styles, national identity, etc.
3. polarity--there has been a change from bipolar conflicts to multipolar ones.

4. structure--the world is now more organized to handle many different types of problems besides military security and peace.
5. resource distribution--the concern in 1952-53 was with maintaining military equilibrium in a bipolar world while now the concern is with a more widespread distribution of not only military and nuclear weapons but also with other types of resources such as technology, trade and food.

3. Evaluation

Students may, verbally or in writing, discuss the question, Which system is more peaceful?, using all or several of the five factors. Or, design a world for the year 2000--what would be the content of the five descriptive factors to make the best world?

Using what was learned about 1953 from the film "Confrontation" that you viewed, and your knowledge of 1971 from the study of current events, fill in the following chart:

	1952-53	1971-72
No. and Type of Actors		
Issues		
Polarity		
Organizational Structure		
Distribution of Resources		